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Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

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Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

Summary

Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, together with Iraqi long-range missile development and support for terrorism, are the primary justifications put forward for military action. On March 17, 2003 President Bush issued an ultimatum demanding that Saddam Hussein and his sons depart from Iraq within 48 hours. On March 19, offensive operations began with air strikes against Iraqi leadership positions. By April 15, after 27 days of operations, coalition forces were in relative control of all major Iraqi cities and Iraqi political and military leadership had disintegrated. On May 1, President Bush declared an end to major combat operations. There was no use of chemical or biological (CB) weapons, and no CB weapons stockpiles have been found.

The major challenges to coalition forces are now quelling a persistent Iraqi resistance movement, restoring of civil order, and providing basic services to the urban population. U.S. troops continue to come under sporadic attacks, primarily in central Iraq. Though initially denying that these attacks were the work of an organized resistance movement, DOD officials have now acknowledged there is at least regional organization, with apparently ample supplies of arms and funding. CENTCOM commander Gen. Abizaid, has characterized the Iraqi resistance as "a classical guerrilla-type campaign. DOD believes the resistance to comprise primarily former regime supporters, however others are concerned that growing resentment of coalition forces and resurgent Iraq nationalism, independent of connections with the earlier regime, may be contributing to the resistance. As of August 4, 250 U.S. troops have died in Iraq operations. Of these deaths, 114 have occurred since May 1, 2003.

Approximately 148,000 U.S. troops are in Iraq. DOD's most recent statement, on July 15, reports that there are 13,273 non-US troops in Iraq from 19 countries, and that an additional 14 countries are committed to deploy another 12,000 troops during the course of the year. The DOD has not, however, released an official and current list of these nations and their contributions. A range of press reports, based upon unattributed DOD statements, have indicated that those nations contributing over a 1,000 troops include: Poland, Spain, the Netherlands, Italy, and the Ukraine. Poland will assume command of an international division that will be based in Karbala, and Spain is to command an hispanic division which will include troops from Central American and Caribbean countries. Nations that have been reported in the press to be contributing troops include: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia (Gruzia) Honduras, Hungary, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia

Congress approved a \$62.37 billion FY2003 supplemental budget request for Iraq operations (H.Rept. 108-76), and DOD currently estimates the cost of operations to be \$3.9 billion per month. Iraq operations' costs are not included in the FY2004 DOD budget, and will be addressed through supplemental budget requests.

This report will be updated as events warrant.

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Iraq: U.S. Military Operations

Background

Iraq's chemical, biological, and nuclear weapons programs, together with Iraqi long-range missile development, and support for terrorism are the primary justifications put forward by the Bush Administration for military action. Since Iraq originally ended cooperation with U.N. inspectors in 1998, there has been little information on the state of Iraq's weapons of mass destruction (WMD) arsenal; however, Administration officials are convinced that Iraq has reconstituted significant capabilities. Initially, leading Administration officials, most notably Vice-President Cheney, Defense Secretary Rumsfeld, and his Deputy Paul Wolfowitz, stressed that "regime change" or the removal of Saddam Hussein from power. Later in 2002, WMD disarmament was emphasized as the primary objective. Expanding on this theme, President Bush, in his speech before the United Nations on September 12, 2002 specified the following conditions for Iraq to meet to forestall military action against it:

- Immediately and unconditionally forswear, disclose, and remove or destroy all weapons of mass destruction, long-range missiles, and all related material.
- End all support for terrorism and act to suppress it.
- Cease persecution of its civilian population.
- Release or account for all Gulf War missing personnel.
- End all illicit trade outside the oil-for-food program and allow United Nations administration of its funds.¹

On March 17, 2003 President Bush issued an ultimatum demanding that Saddam Hussein and his sons depart from Iraq within 48 hours. On March 19, offensive operations commenced with air strikes against Iraqi leadership positions.

Military Planning & Combat Operations

The Department of Defense officially released limited official information concerning war planning or preparations against Iraq prior to the onset of offensive operations. There were, however, frequent and significant news leaks which provided a range of details. News reports indicated that the military options that were under discussion varied significantly in their assumptions regarding Iraq military capabilities, the usefulness of Iraqi opposition groups, the attitude of regional governments, and the U.S. military resources that would be required.

¹ President Bush's Address to the U.N. General Assembly, September 12, 2002.

Options Considered

In the wake of the successful operations in Afghanistan against the Taliban, some Administration officials advocated a similar operation, entailing use of special operations forces in cooperation with indigenous Iraqi opposition forces, coupled with an extensive air offensive to destroy Hussein's most reliable Republican Guard units, command & control centers, and WMD capabilities. This approach assumed that the regular Iraqi army would prove unreliable, and could even join opposition forces once it is clear that defeat is imminent. To encourage this, significant emphasis would be placed on an intensive psychological warfare or "psyops" campaign to undermine the morale of Iraqi soldiers and unit commanders, persuading them of the hopelessness of resistance.²

While having the advantage of not requiring large staging areas (though some regional air basing would be required) or months to prepare, this was generally considered the riskiest approach. The weakness of Iraqi opposition military forces and their competing political agendas place their effectiveness in question, and predicting the behavior of regular Iraqi Army units under attack is problematic. This option also did not address the possibility of stiff resistance by Republican Guard units in the environs of Baghdad, nor the troop requirements of a post-conflict occupation.

This "lite" option stood in contrast to the operations plan originally offered by U.S. Central Command. This option, often called the "Franks Plan", after Army Gen. Tommy Franks, the U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) commander who first briefed it to the President, calls for a large-scale ground force invasion. News reports initially indicated, however, that this "heavy" approach did not receive the support of the DOD civilian leadership or White House advisors. Questions over the reliability of the regional support that would be necessary for staging areas and the length of time required for deployment were the major concerns.³ However, the White House rejection of the "Franks Plan" came prior to the decision to take the Iraq issue to the United Nations Security Council. When it became clear that Security Council deliberations and the re-introduction of U.N. inspectors to Iraq could delay the possibility of military action for several months, it was apparently decided that this interlude would allow time both to negotiate regional cooperation and to deploy more substantial forces to the Persian Gulf region, and military operations today appear to adhere closer to CENTCOM's original recommendations. As the ground force offensive has slowed, however, there was increasing criticism of DOD's civilian leadership for not permitting the deployment of even more ground forces prior to onset of operations.⁴

² "Timing, Tactics on Iraq War Disputed; Top Bush Officials Criticize Generals' Conventional Views", *Washington Post*, August 1, 2002. p. 1

³ "The Iraq Build-up, II", *National Journal*, October 5, 2002. p. 2866.

⁴ "Rumsfeld's Role as War Strategist Under Scrutiny", *Reuters*, March 30, 2003.

Combat Operations Prior to May 1, 2003

Offensive operations combined an air offensive and simultaneous ground offensive, in contrast to the 1991 campaign which saw weeks of air attacks to soften Iraqi resistance. U.S. Central Command's operational plan employed a smaller ground force than the 1991 Desert Storm operation, reflecting an assessment that Iraqi armed forces were neither as numerous nor as capable as they were ten years ago, and that U.S. forces are significantly more capable. This option depended upon the continued cooperation of regional nations for substantial staging areas/airbases and required months to deploy the necessary forces.

Though press reports differed somewhat, reportedly over 340,000 U.S. military personnel were in the Persian Gulf region (ashore and afloat). The 3rd Mechanized Infantry Division, the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault), the 7th Cavalry Regiment, and the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force formed the bulk of the U.S. ground offensive. The 4th Mechanized Infantry Division arrived late in theater. Ships bearing its equipment remained off Turkey for weeks awaiting the outcome of negotiations to permit establishing a northern front attacking from Turkey, and then were diverted to the Persian Gulf when these negotiations fell through. The U.S. Navy deployed five of its twelve naval aircraft carrier battle groups. The Air Force had approximately 15 air wings operating in the region. Strategic bombers operated from the British airbase at Diego Garcia, and airbases in the Middle East, Europe, and the United States. The United Kingdom deployed over 47,000 personnel, including a naval task force, an armored task force, a Royal Marine brigade, a parachute brigade, a Special Air Service regiment, and a Special Boat Squadron. The majority of these British forces were engaged in southeastern Iraq, securing the Umm Qasr and Basra region. Australia deployed approximately 2,000 personnel, primarily special operations personnel, and one F/A-18 attack aircraft squadron. Poland had 200 special operations troops around Basra. (For more detailed information, see CRS Report RL31763, *Iraq: A Summary of U.S. Forces* and CRS Report RL31843, *Iraq Foreign Stances Toward U.S. Policy*)

The invasion of Iraq was expected to begin with a 72-96 hour air offensive to paralyze the Iraqi command structure, and demoralize Iraqi resistance across the military-civilian spectrum. Intelligence reports indicating the possibility of striking Saddam Hussein and his immediate circle led to an acceleration of the operations plan, and an almost simultaneously onset of air and ground offensive operations. CENTCOM air commanders stressed that significant efforts would be made to minimize civilian casualties and damage to Iraqi physical infrastructure, and they were mostly successful in this effort.

With twenty-five days of offensive operations, coalition forces had relative control of all major Iraqi cities, including Baghdad, Basra, Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tikrit. CENTCOM pursued a strategy of rapid advance, by-passing urban centers when possible, pausing only when encountering Iraqi resistance. CENTCOM spokesmen characterized Iraqi resistance as sporadic and uncohesive. Oilfields and port facilities throughout Iraq were secured, as have all major air bases in Iraq. Though a few oil wells were set afire, all were quelled, and there has been no widespread environmental sabotage. Allied forces did not encounter the mass surrenders characteristic of the 1991 campaign, however DOD reported that over 6,000 Iraqis

were taken prisoner, and believes that many more have simply deserted their positions. Iraqi paramilitary forces, particularly the Saddam Fedayeen, engaged in guerrilla-style attacks from urban centers in the rear areas, but did not inflict significant damage. Nevertheless, greater attention than anticipated had to be paid to protecting extended supply lines, and securing these urban centers, particularly around an-Nasiriyah and Najaf, and in the British sector around Umm Qasr and Basra.

Though CENTCOM commanders expressed confidence in the adequacy of their force structure in theater, the Iraqi attacks in rear areas and the length of the supply lines to forward units led some to suggest that insufficient ground forces were in place to continue the offensive while securing rear areas and ensuring uninterrupted logistical support. These critics faulted DOD civilian leadership for overestimating the effectiveness of a precision air offensive and curtailing the deployment of more ground troops, suggesting that an ideological commitment to smaller ground forces and greater reliance on high-tech weaponry had dominated military planning.⁵ With collapse of the Iraqi regime, however, this criticism muted.

Without permission to use Turkish territory, CENTCOM was unable to carry out an early ground offensive in Northern Iraq. However, Special operations forces, the 173rd Airborne Brigade, and air-lifted U.S. armor, operating with Kurdish irregulars seized Mosul, Kirkuk, and Tikrit. Cooperation with Kurdish militias in the north has been excellent. Even a mistaken airstrike against a allied Kurdish vehicle convoy, killing or wounding senior Kurdish leaders, did not adversely affect this cooperation. Potentially complicating the situation in the north, was a Turkish desire to possibly augment the 8,000+ troops it has had stationed in Kurdish-held territory in order to block possible Kurdish refugees and influence the accommodations made to the Kurds in a post-conflict Iraq. Turkish military spokesmen have indicated that no additional Turkish forces will move into Iraq at this time. The U.S. has assured Turkey that the Kurdish forces involved in seizing Mosul and Kirkuk would be withdrawn and replaced with U.S. troops.

Post-May, 2003 Operations

With the onset of widespread looting and the breakdown of public services (electricity, water) in the cities, coalition forces were confronted with the challenges of restoring public order and infrastructure even before combat operations ceased. Though U.S. forces have come under criticism for not having done more to prevent looting, the transition from combat to police roles is a difficult one, particularly when an important objective is winning popular support. Harsh reactions risk alienation of the population, yet inaction reduces confidence in the ability of coalition forces to maintain order. Indicative of the seriousness of the civil disorder, U.S. officials in Iraq authorized U.S. troops to shoot looters if necessary.⁶ In addition to looting,

⁵ "Questions Raised About Invasion Force", *Washington Post*, March 25, 2003. p. 17

⁶ "U.S. Military Chief Vows More Troops to Quell Iraqi Looting", *New York Times*, May (continued...)

coalition forces also have to ensure that factional violence and does not derail stabilization efforts. CENTCOM headquarters intends to “greatly increase” the number of troops patrolling Iraqi cities.⁷ U.S. forces, however, are spread relatively thin throughout Iraq, it is clear that additional troops in theater could improve the pace and breadth of stabilization operations. The question of how many military personnel will be required for stabilization operations has been a subject of controversy since well before the onset of operations. This controversy reflects the great difficulty in predicting how the political and military situation in post-war Iraq will evolve, and how long a military presence would be required before an acceptable and stable Iraqi government can be established.

The attitude of the Iraq population is the key element, and will depend upon a variety of factors, such as the nature and extent of war damage, the demands of ethnic and religious minorities, and the speed with which a credible government can be established. A short-term post-war occupation was a possibility, however given that so far the Iraqi population has not demonstrated an unqualified acceptance of coalition forces, it is now considered likely that a continued deployment of substantial military ground forces will be necessary for several years. For comparison, in the relatively benign environment and considerably smaller areas of Bosnia and Kosovo, after eight years of peacekeeping operations, NATO still maintains a deployment of about 60,000 troops.

Coalition troops continue to come under sporadic attacks, primarily in central Iraq. Though casualties have been relatively light, the potential for attack affects the pace and mode of reconstruction and stabilization operations. Troops must assume a potentially hostile environment, yet avoid incidents or actions that would erode popular support. In addition to attacks, there have been attacks on infrastructure targets (e.g., oil/gas pipelines, electrical power stations and lines) hindering efforts to restore basic services to the civilian population. Attacks on oil pipelines also threatens to further delay the use of Iraqi oil exports to fund reconstruction programs. Though it is virtually impossible to fully protect these pipelines from sabotage, it is hoped that ongoing efforts to recruit a civilian Iraqi militia will provide coalition troops some assistance in this mission.

Though initially denying that these attacks were the work of an organized resistance movement, DOD officials have now acknowledged there is at least regional organization, with apparently ample supplies of arms and funding. CENTCOM commander Gen. Abizaid, has characterized the Iraqi resistance as “a classical guerrilla-type campaign.”⁸ DOD believes the resistance to comprise primarily former regime supporters such as Baathist party members, Republican Guard soldiers, and paramilitary personnel. However, others are concerned that growing resentment of coalition forces and resurgent Iraq nationalism, independent of

⁶ (...continued)
15. p. 21.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ DOD New Briefing July 16, 2003.

connections with the earlier regime, may be contributing to the resistance.⁹ There are also reports of bounties of from \$1,000-\$5,000 being offered for killing coalition troops, taking advantage of the severe economic dislocation which has many Iraqis with no regular income. Captured documents have given some indication that preparations for a resistance movement were made prior to the war, including the caching of arms and money.

In response to these attacks on coalition forces, CENTCOM has undertaken operations to locate and detain suspected resistance members. These operations have resulted in the detention of hundreds of individuals, the capture of some high-ranking officials of the former regime, the seizure of very substantial caches of weapons and money, and the deaths of Saddam Hussein's sons.

The continued Iraqi armed resistance has reinvigorated the debate over whether the United States has committed sufficient troops to the Iraqi operation. The rapid success of the combat offensive quieted critics who argued that a substantially larger ground force should have been deployed, but the question is now being raised whether a more robust military presence in Iraq is needed to bring stability. Secretary Rumsfeld and out-going CENTCOM commander Gen. Franks both maintained in congressional testimony that the number of troops in Iraq is adequate for the mission, though CENTCOM is currently reviewing troop requirements under its new commander, Gen. Abizaid. If it is decided that additional forces are required, this will present a challenge to the Army. Of its 33 combat brigades, 16 are already deployed in Iraq, and but three of the remaining brigades have assigned missions (e.g., Afghanistan, the Balkans, Korea) or are in strategic reserve. Thus, even at current levels, troop rotation has proven problematic. This was demonstrated when two brigades of the 3rd Infantry Division had their return to the United States postponed for the second time until an indefinite date in the Fall. DOD has now prepared a rotation plan for duty tours in Iraq, which calls for units to spend a one-year tour of duty in the region. It will, however, require greater use of National Guard and Reserve units, and may increase the participation of U.S. Marine units in stabilization operations.

The possible need for additional troops in Iraq has rekindled the debate over whether the U.S. Army personnel end-strength should be increased. Currently, the congressionally mandated end-strength is 480,000. In reporting the FY2004 Defense Authorization Act, the House Armed Services Committee noted the "inadequacy of military manpower, especially active component end-strength, as indicated in the need to activate 33,000 reservists annually". The report further noted that the Army had estimated its manpower shortfall to be between 41,000 to 123,000 personnel. DOD's civilian leadership intends to address shortfalls in specific functions by moving personnel from lower priority assignments, and by increasing the use of civilians in some functional areas to free up active duty military personnel. The newly confirmed Army Chief of Staff, Gen. Schoomaker, has indicated that a further review of Army personnel requirements is underway, and will provide recommendations in the context of the FY2005 DOD budget request.

⁹ "Iraqis Skeptical Over U.S. Explanation for Continuing Attacks on Coalition", *London Financial Times*, August 4, 2003. p. 5.

A key element in the Defense Department's consideration of troop requirements in Iraq is the willingness of other nations to contribute ground forces. DOD's most recent statement, on July 15, reports that there are 13,273 non-US troops in Iraq from 19 countries, and that an additional 14 countries are committed to deploy another 12,000 troops during the course of the year.

DOD has not, however, released an official and current list of these nations and their contributions. A range of press reports, based upon unattributed DOD officials, have indicated that those nations contributing over a 1,000 troops include: Poland, Spain, The Netherlands, Italy, and the Ukraine. Poland will assume command of an international division that will assume responsibility for southwestern Iraq, and Spain is to command an hispanic division which will include troops from Central American and Caribbean countries. Nations that have been reported in the press to be contributing troops include: Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Denmark, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Estonia, Georgia (Gruzia) Honduras, Hungary, Japan, Kazakhstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Macedonia, Mongolia, Nicaragua, Norway, Portugal, Romania, and Slovakia.

Costs

Predicting the cost of military operations is a task that DOD did not undertake prior to the peace-keeping deployments to the Balkans, and it remains a highly conjectural exercise. Methodologies tend to be relatively crude and based upon historical experience, i.e., "the last war". Though initially Secretary Rumsfeld expressed his opinion that "it is unknowable what a war or conflict like that would cost", in early 2003 he estimated a cost of under \$50 billion. Other DOD officials anticipated an \$80-85 billion cost, assuming a 6-month follow-on occupation.¹⁰

On March 25, 2003 The Administration submitted a \$74.7 billion FY2003 supplemental appropriations request, of which \$62.6 billion was for Department of Defense expenses related to the war in Iraq through September 2003. Specifically, this request included funds for preparatory costs incurred, costs associated with military operations, replenishing munitions, and funds to support other nations. The Administration stated that this supplemental request was "built on the key assumption that U.S. military action in Iraq will be swift and decisive."¹¹ Both the House and Senate approved the legislative conference report to H.R. 1559 (H.Rept. 108-76), which provided \$62.37 billion. DOD now estimates that Iraq military operations are costing \$3.9 billion a month, but has declined to offer any long-term estimates of funding requirements.

Prior to the war, a number of cost estimates were put forward. Michael O'Hanlon of the Brookings Institution, pegged a 250,000-strong invasion at between \$40-\$50 billion with a follow-up occupation costing \$10-\$20 billion a year. Former

¹⁰ "War Could Cost More Than \$40 billion", *Knight-Ridder Wire Service*, September 18, 2002; "Iraq War Costs Could Soar, Pentagon Says", *Los Angeles Times*, February 26, 2003.

¹¹ Office of Management and Budget, Press Release No. 2003-6, March 25, 2002.

White House economic advisor Lawrence Lindsay estimated the high limit on the cost to be 1-2% of GNP, or about \$100-\$200 billion. Mitch Daniels, Director of the Office of Management and Budget subsequently discounted this estimate as “very, very high”, and stated that the costs would be between \$50-\$60 billion, though no specific supporting figures were provided for the estimate.¹² In its most recent cost estimate, the Congressional Budget Office put deployment costs at about \$14 billion, with combat operations costing \$10 billion for the first month and \$8 billion a month thereafter. CBO cited the cost of returning combat forces to home bases at \$9 billion, and the costs of continued occupation of Iraq to run between \$1-4 billion.¹³

The American Academy of Arts and Sciences has published a much more wide-ranging report which covers the possibility of an extended occupation, in addition to potential long-term economic consequences and concludes that potential costs could range from \$99 billion to \$1.2 trillion.¹⁴ For comparison, the cost to the United States of the Persian Gulf War in 1990-91 was approximately \$60 billion, and almost all of this cost was offset by international financial contributions.¹⁵

¹² Bumiller, Elisabeth. “Budget Director Lowers Estimate of Cost of War”, *New York Times*, December 31, 2002. p. 1

¹³ Congressional Budget Office. *An Analysis of the President’s Budgetary Proposals for Fiscal Year 2004: An Interim Report*. March 2003

¹⁴ *War with Iraq: Costs, Consequences, and Alternatives*. American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Dec. 2002. [http://www.amacad.org/publications/monographs/Iraq_Press.pdf]

¹⁵ *Persian Gulf War: U.S. Costs and Allied Financial Contributions*. CRS Issue Brief IB91019. September 1992.